Life After Death In The Metaverse

SOCIETY

Can we continue living inside a computer network?

AUTHOR
Rohit Farmer

PUBLISHED
February 24, 2022

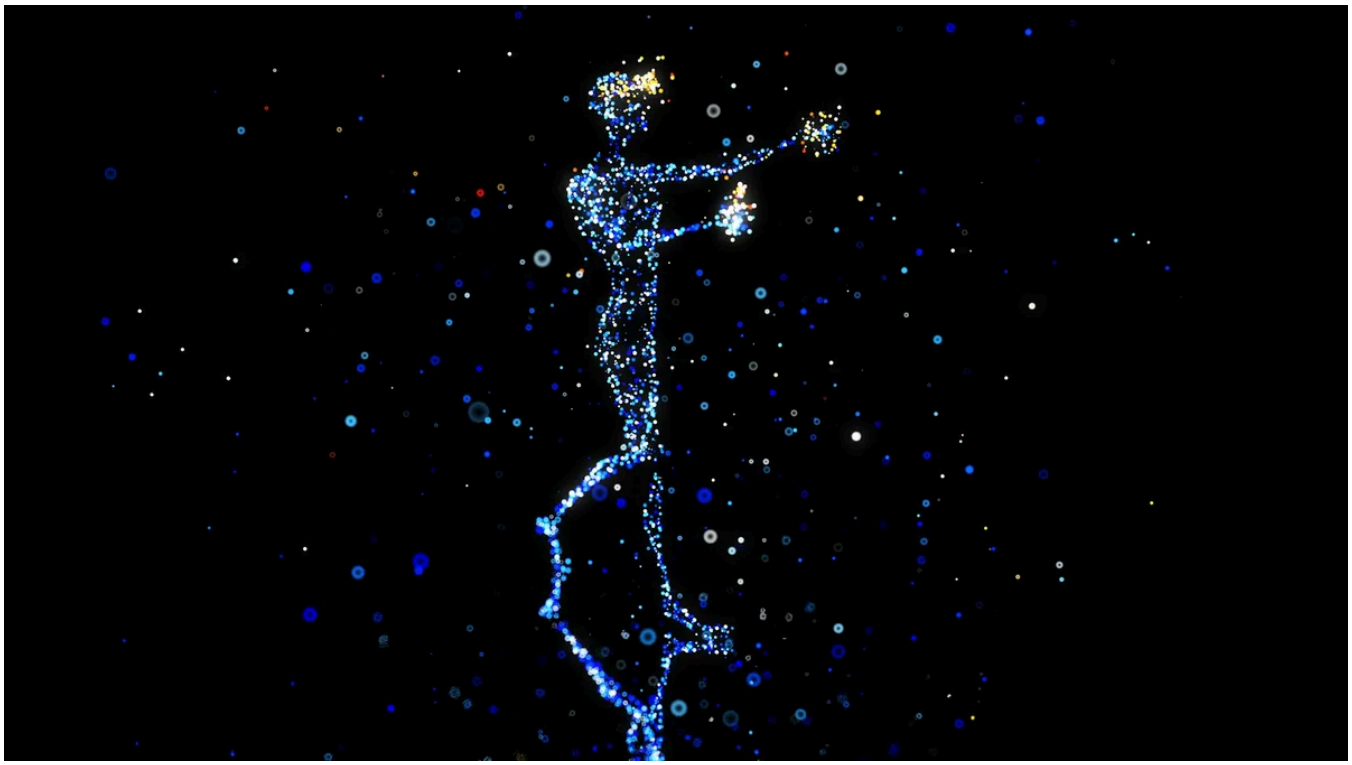

Photo by julien Tromeur on Unsplash

Note: published initially at https://rohitfarmer.medium.com/life-after-death-in-the-metaverse-9d2f58e698ec

On February 3, 2022, I responded to a tweet from the MIT CSAIL (Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory) that asked the question “What do you think of the Metaverse?” with my answer, “If only I could transfer my conscience/brain before I die so that I can live forever in the metaverse. Or if my avatar gets trained enough that when I die, it can still interact with my folks in a similar capacity.” My answer was spontaneous without giving much thought. However, by Feb 15, 834 people saw it, and 16 engaged somehow. So, some people find it intriguing.

Afterward, I thought more about what I tweeted, which led to a whole roller coaster of thoughts that I will elaborate on here. I would highly appreciate comments on this post to discuss this topic further from both a philosophical and technical point of view.

Life after death is as old a concept as history itself. Most organized religions say yes, there is life after physical death either in the form of reincarnation, which means your spirit will return to earth by entering into another human/animal. Or your soul will either rest in heaven or rot in hell depending upon your faith and deeds. However, what interests me is not the religious version of life after death but the technological version. We have seen in countless movies where a human has almost died and is revived by swapping his damaged organs with robotic or artificial parts. We call them Cyborgs (cyber organisms).

In some cases, there is also an attempt to wipe out human memories and emotions and train and control the Cyborg for a specific purpose. But, most of the time, Cyborg gains consciousness and rebels. But all this is not the same as dying; it simply means repurposing your still somewhat functioning body. What if the human died and there is no part of his body salvageable? The actual death — buried in the ground or burnt to ashes.

In the movie Chappie , Dev Patel (forced by a gang) reprograms an artificial general intelligence police robot to be used by the gang members in their robbery. However, in addition to learning how to help its teammates in the theft. Chappie also learned human emotions, figured out what conscience means, and built a system to transfer its conscience into another healthier robot via computer. Unfortunately, towards the end of the movie, Dev Patel himself died. Still, before he breathed last, Chappie moved his conscience to a robot similar to itself. **This I would regard as life after death as your human body made of bones and flesh has expired, but your conscience/brain/soul still lives on.**

Now about the Metaverse . I am sure you must have already heard the term (recently popularized by Meta/Facebook); if not, then it's an attempt to create a virtual universe of interconnected cyberspaces. These cyberspaces could be social networking platforms,

gaming environments, and e-commerce. At the moment, the metaverse is a concept of how people will interact over the internet rather than a ready product in itself. However, some argue it already exists in its rudimentary form of unconnected components.

The metaverse's key component is to provide life-like interactions in 3D by wearing a virtual reality headset and haptic gears. Imagine doing a Zoom meeting in 3D, one example of mentally picturing it. Instead of looking at a gallery of people on a 2D screen, we would interact with each other's 3D avatar inside a virtual room. We can turn around and see the participants sitting next to us in a round table conference or a lecture hall. Maybe our haptic gears even extend our ability to feel the sense of touch — handshakes, a tap at the back, or even a hug. Maybe smell also. I don't know if we can do that yet, but I am sure that an expert in the field must be thinking about it.

The grander vision is that Metaverse will serve more than a communication platform. It will act as a perpetually existing universe parallel to the physical universe where people can build their digital identity. Building this digital identity will mean selecting an avatar to represent your physical form and having the ability to participate in the virtual world economy/ecosystem by buying real estate, establishing businesses, and buying designer clothes and merchandise for your avatar. An existing example of such a platform is Decentraland . It is a web browser-based 3D environment (that does not require a headset at the moment) in which users can buy real estate and other artifacts with real money channeled through cryptocurrencies. Even though these digital properties do not fall under the purview of regulatory laws of the physical world, their economic dynamics are the same. For example, suppose you buy a piece of land in the Decentraland right now. In that case, its future value will appreciate following similar principles as the physical world.

Going back to my thought of life after death, will an avatar in a perpetually existing digital universe, aka Metaverse, represent ourselves once our physical body has expired. Probably not at the moment because, for example, even though Decentraland resides permanently inside a computer network, the avatars do what a human asks them to do. There is a direct connection between an avatar and its living owner. It cannot act on its own will. However, if we keep participating in the Decentraland long enough, can our avatar learn (through AI) the way we speak, our body language, our quirks, patterns of thinking, and life's philosophies so that it can mimic us independently. Alternatively, like in the movie Chappie will it be possible to transfer our conscience to an avatar inside a virtual universe. Of course, neither of the scenarios mentioned above is possible at the moment; however, this is the direction I want to think.

Transferring human conscience into a machine is probably more complex. We still do not entirely understand human conscience and the data storage and processing requirements if we want to put it inside a computer. However, training an avatar over decades or a lifetime seems plausible given the latest advancements in AI . I imagine if I keep participating in the Metaverse by populating it with pictures, videos, status updates, shopping preferences, reading lists, hobbies, and interests, then my avatar should look and sound and think and communicate like me. It is also interesting to think will I be comfortable during my lifetime to let my trained or in-training avatar autonomously start emulating me. However, it might be

helpful as I can fine-tune the training process. As shown in movies, I do not want to think what will happen if my avatar goes rogue and takes over my earthly possessions or miss lead someone. However, it is also interesting to imagine that one of my friends liked to interact with my avatar more than myself as it sounds and behaves better than I do in real life. But that would mean the training did not go well, and the avatar is not my accurate representation. Even though it seems more plausible, training an avatar is not the same as transferring your conscience/brain into a machine because it's only an emulation of you, not yourself. Therefore, it will not fully justify life after death I postulated in the text above.

But what would the utility of a trained avatar that can mimic me? Would he be able to take my place when I am gone? Will my children and grandchildren find peace in my death, or will it prevent them from moving on? I can see one advantage in having an animated version of myself left behind. My future generation can interact as I were alive instead of looking at my non-interactive pictures and videos. For example, I never met my great-grandparents. I only heard stories about them, but what if I log into a computer network and talk with their trained avatar. Would it be able to communicate with me in their voice, facial expressions, and body language? And if I need advice from a wise old man, could I ask his avatar? Would it also be as wise as he was? That is a difficult question as wisdom is not the same as intelligence. The trained avatar may give me an answer based on the life experiences that it learned from the data submitted by my great grandfather but maybe nothing beyond that. That begs another question: would the avatar training be only limited to the data submitted by the user during his lifetime, or could it keep evolving even after death. Sure there would be non-availability of the primary user data. However, the avatar can still learn about the evolving world and its future generations from their data streams. That would mean my great grandfather's avatar would communicate his life experiences and also know that I am his great-grandson and what is happening in my life.

Another utility might be the ability to keep earning for your future generations. For example, in the case of teachers, yoga instructors, etc., can their trained avatar continue serving their clients and generating revenue for their families. However, this may add to a host of problems of its own. For example, if trained avatars keep working, will it not affect the already growing unemployment numbers? I always find it stupid for people who are retired from their primary professions to re-enter the workforce on a lower salary just because they don't have anything else to do in their lives. It just eats up a space that should go to a young professional struggling to find a job.

Now, the ethical and theological arguments. Death is the only constant, the ultimate destination of human life. It hurts when someone we know dies, but we also move on, continuing the life cycle; that is part of our evolution. I don't know how changing this constant to the perpetual continuity of human existence will affect us psychologically and spiritually. For many of us, living a pious life is to earn an eternal reward of peaceful life after our physical death. Our current morals are primarily shaped around our fear of facing judgment in life after death, be it cast to hell or transformed into an inferior species upon reincarnation. I guess we will still conform to the same moral standards, as we do not know if the transfer of

consciousness would mean the same as transferring one's spirit or soul. And this dilemma would only be applicable if we consider moving our conscience to a machine, not in the case of a trained avatar.

I don't know how and where to end this article. Therefore, I will leave it here and let the readers reach their conclusions.

For me, as a technology/AI enthusiast who considers Alexa a family member, I would want my trained avatar or conscience/brain to exist in a machine for perpetuity …

Cite as: Farmer, Rohit. (2022). Life After Death In The Metaverse. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7231887

View the original article online: https://rohitfarmer.com/posts/2022/life-after-death-in-the-metaverse/

© 2026 Rohit Farmer.
Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).